

Forest management in the Pacific Northwest has been a center piece of our regional economy, social systems, and ecological legacy since statehood. Forest reserves were created at time when Americans believed that western forests were boundless, and would exist into perpetuity. Later, these western reserves (renamed National Forests) – and the Oregon and California lands – became the primary sources of wood products for the entire nation.

More recently, controversy surrounding the management of forested public lands in our states has proliferated. Combined with mechanization and changing trade practices, litigation surrounding the northern spotted owl, salmon, and other at risk species has dramatically changed how these forests are managed. The situation is complicated by the legacy of past over-logging and fire suppression, and the implications of global climate change on forests are still largely unknown.

Congressman DeFazio has a long history on forest management issues in the Northwest. He has long called for additional ecologically-based thinning of overstocked and fire suppressed forests, as well as protection of rare old growth forest ecosystems. He has been a leader in defending programs – such as the Secure Rural Schools legislation – that provide predictable economic support for rural communities, most of which have been historically dependant on natural resources from public lands. Congressman DeFazio's district could be considered the heart of the timber industry in the Northwest.

It is Congressman DeFazio's view that there is a distinct lack of balance regarding federal forest management in our region. Too much logging in the 1970s and 1980s led to the Northwest Forest Plan in the early 1990s. Heralded by many as a "compromise," the Northwest Forest Plan's early years were marred by the Salvage Rider, which resulted in the logging of thousands of acres of old growth forests and increased distrust of the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. Subsequent lawsuits by both the environmental community and the timber industry resulted in spates of logging truncated by regional injunctions.

This situation continues today, with agency decisions to amend critical habitat for the northern spotted owl and marbled murrelet, eliminate the Survey and Manage program, alter the Aquatic Conservation Strategy, implement a recovery plan for the spotted owl, and revise the forest

plans for Bureau of Land Management lands in southern Oregon, all due out in the next few months. Amendments to forest plans east of the Cascade crest, as well as decisions to salvage log recently burned forests, guarantee that these forests will not be left out of the controversy. Litigation is sure to follow all of these decisions, because they all involve the fate of old growth forests – which engender strong emotions on the part of many segments of society. Meanwhile, rural communities are caught in the middle.

There are bright spots – many of them. For example, collaborative groups of varied stakeholders have begun to implement sensible forest management projects across our region. Efforts in the Colville National Forest have resulted in a proposal to improve forestry, wildlife habitat, and recreation on that forest, and will result in more noncontroversial logs to the local mill (see, http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/connelly/325392_joel27.html). Environmentalists, loggers, community members, and labor interests have joined together on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest to develop and promote a large thinning project that will restore logged-over forests. In Lakeview, Oregon, another diverse group of interested people are about to open a small diameter mill to help reduce the fire risk in nearby forests. In southern Oregon (our district), parties to earlier litigation – including industry, conservation, and agency interests – have turned controversy into an opportunity to work together to return the Ashland watershed to more fire-resilient conditions. The community of Hayfork, California, has also begun to work with new allies to explore alternatives to management gridlock.

Whether these collaborative efforts will succeed in overcoming the historic controversy – and that which is on the horizon – around forest management in the Pacific Northwest is unknown.

Congressman DeFazio believes that it is time for Congress to step in and provide the clear direction regarding forest management that has been lacking in our region. He would like to boost ecologically-based thinning in logged-over forests west of the crest and fire suppressed forests on the east side. He also believes it is time to make the call that the Northwest Forest Plan was unable to make in 1994: that old growth forests should be off the table. These changes would be accomplished through a robust collaborative process that brings together all interested parties to formulate projects for watershed restoration. Community benefit would be a cornerstone of this plan. Utilization of existing procedural mechanisms – but packaged in innovative ways – will reduce the time it takes to get good projects implemented on the ground. Legal safeguards, however, remain available.

For additional information about the Pacific Northwest Forest Legacy Act, please review the Frequently Asked Questions document, the section-by-section analysis, and the Act itself.

[Pacific Northwest Forest Legacy Act Frequently Asked Questions](#)

[Pacific Northwest Forest Legacy Act Section by Section](#)

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